If you go down to the woods today

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If you go down to the woods today

by AtticusCrete

Summary

Two weeks in a little cabin? Sounds idyllic. Apart from the stalkers, and the murder, obviously.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

You better go in disguise

'Yeah, it's great actually. Quiet but I can walk to a grocers. People near by but not too near. Summer isn't quite over but not so many tourists. I like it a lot.'

'Has anyone been out to see you?'

'Hannibal brought me. It meant I wouldn't be tempted to get in the car and drive home! But no one else yet.'

'Because obviously you miss us that much! We'd come and see you this minute, except. You know.'

'I do. How are they both?'

Jimmy sighed 'I think they might actually manage not to be be in shit storm meetings all day today'

'Because Abigail basically escaped?'

'Technically not as she hadn't been charged with anything then'

'Then being the word! What's going to happen next? Apart from a hearing?'

'APB out on Abigail and Nicholas Boyle. Cassie Boyle is missing but she's not been issued with any kind of warrant. So..'

'You think the three of them are together?'

'That's my take. But who knows? Anyway Bev asked me to ask you if we can come up Tomorrow just for a night or two?'

'Sure. Of course. Actually, maybe I should ask Hannibal?'

'Oh yeah, it belongs to his friend doesn't it?'

'I tried to get him earlier has he been pulled in to the enquiry?'

'He's given his statement. You know, I think Jack was mildly concerned he might sue. He got a nasty lump on the head. But he was only there in a sort of consulting role so he's not been involved'

'When you say consulting role Jimmy. What does that mean?'

'It means I don't think Jack did the proper paperwork for Alana and Hannibal to go with Bev and Brian, and I'm not 100% sure about the paperwork for them or Abigail'

'Oh. That's a bit of a mess then?'

'Yup. It surely is. If I see Dr L shall I ask him?'

'Yeah, sure. Could you mention I was going to as well! So he doesn't think I'm assuming?! (Jimmy laughs) I wonder if he'll come up too? I think he thought he might. But possibly it depends on work or what ever he had planned before all this started. Or finished. Or whatever it is. Oh, If you do all come up I need to warn you about a few things. It's an unusual place. So you'll tell Hannibal?'

'I'll make sure he knows.'

'Great. Thanks Jimmy. Love to everyone'

'You too Will. See you at the weekend barring disaster'

'God don't say that!'

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hey Hannibal. I've not been able to get hold of you. Wow. Since yesterday. Sorry. I hope you're ok? I'm sorry about the mess you've been dragged in to. If you've got a chance it'd be good to talk to you. Sorry if I'm fussing. Bev and Brian have asked to come up this weekend (with Jimmy), I wanted to ask if that was ok. And if it is if you wanted to come too? Be careful, right! Will

Hannibal reads the text again. Kind of Will to think like this. But then he is essentially a compassionate man. He likes the bit where Will thinks he might be fussing. He is, but Hannibal is content for it to be so.

Will. How kind of you to enquire. It is quite alright for your science team friends to visit. Do mention to Indigo and she will point you in the direction of bed linen and other necessities. I'm afraid I'm otherwise occupied at the weekend. Might I prevail on your kindness and come towards the middle or end of next week? Maybe Tuesday or Wednesday, if it is still your plan to return on Friday? If it seems like something you'd enjoy I shall then be able to combine it with returning you home. I don't think you're fussing. And if you were it would not be entirely unwelcome. It is good to know we are of value to our friends. Warm regards, Hannibal Lecter

Hannibal clicks send. He spoke to Jimmy yesterday and has since had some thoughts about how to make his commitments of the next two weeks all fit in. There're family matters to address this weekend, that he has left too long. And someone else to encourage, just a little.

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'Oh my, you weren't joking, this place is amazing. I thought it was just a cabin.'

'I've just been in the bathroom it's got this weird really deep bath with a shower head too!'

'There are futons and tatami! And sliding screen doors. Please tell me there are normal pillows and sheets and things'

'Bev I know your family is Korean, don't they have any of this sort of stuff.'

'Ahh Mr South East Asian Cosmopolitan! No. they've lived in the US for ever! My granny says 'tatami' mats are only good for giving to bad visitors!'

'I love it here. It was a bit odd the first day or too, basically living on the floor, but I really like it now. Have you found the library? That's more western in set up though the low rocker in there is amazing. It's encouraged me to stop where ever I am in the cabin and pull over a quilt and just go to sleep.'

The whole cabin is basically a traditional Japanese style shoin-zukuri with sliding partitions and paper screens, low wooden and bamboo tables, tatami and futons for sleeping. Will had envisaged something from the Yukon and got something from Yokohama instead. In the simple garden in the back there is even a pond with koi. There are many Japanese maple and acacia. It's very beautiful.

He'd once had to spend a week at a conference in San Francisco, Japantown and the Japanese garden in the Golden Gate Park were what had made it memorable. That and a trip round the Museum of Asian Art. He'd had mochi there for the first time. Enjoying the squeakyness on the teeth of the bean cakes. He bought a few cds and later read up on Japanese music and then theatre and art. Then he'd started on stories, and philosophy. There is a good selection here.

He'd been fascinated by some of the concepts like wabi sabi and the practice of kintsukoroi. And now it transpires Hannibal has a friend who is likewise influenced. He likes the simplicity. Finds it reaches some place deep inside him that keeps him warm. There were some simple clothes in the house when he'd arrived which Hannibal had encouraged him to use. The loose trousers and jackets smell of indigo, the parallel lines of stitching helping quilt the fabrics and provide a gentle subtle adornment. There's a wool jacket too called a haori that Will hasn't taken off since he arrived.

It is a house in which it is possible to breathe. The main living room has cushions and a heated kotatsu, a low table with a sort of duvet that you stick your legs under to keep warm, it also has chairs with a base and back but no legs. He is falling in love with the space, more and more, day by day. He's glad to be able to share it.

They move screens and partitions and create a space for everyone so they have a place they wish to occupy. Food is unpacked and put away. Hot drinks are made. And the four of them gather in the living room.

'Can I just lounge here for the next three days please? And not move, and someone bring me sushi and saki and stuff?'

'Do you like sushi, or saki?'

'I like the idea of it'

'Fair enough'

Will laughs. He explains that there are lots of cookery books and he's been experimenting! It's been enjoyable and a bit of a disaster too!

'Sushi rice is very sticky. I know this the hard way. And I nearly set fire to myself making tempura'

They don't ask.

For the first time ever Will is not the most tired of the group. He wonders if it's a good idea to ask or not. Maybe after dinner.

'So, I thought I'd cook tonight then tomorrow you lot are kicking in, for breakfast and lunch and maybe we'll get take out for dinner? Sunday the same. Will you go back in the evening or Monday morning?'

'Jack said we have to be back on Monday. So it's either leave here at 5am to get back for ten, or we go late Sunday night. Opinions?'

It's a close run thing but they decide on going late on Sunday. Still that's over 48 hours away. They can get some serious relaxing in before then.

In the early evening Will cooks dinner whilst Brian chats to him. Jimmy is reading 'the Hare with the Amber Eyes, and Beverly a Hello Kitty introduction to Japanese. They're in the living room but have pulled back the screen between them and the kitchen so everyone can join in if it gets interesting. Brian is mostly talking about how he hopes Jack won't throw them under a bus. Or himself. Alana is out of hospital but her mother has come to stay with her.

'I phoned her yesterday. I think she'd have liked to come up with us, but by then her mother had arranged to come, and stay. So she had to knuckle under. Judith was pulling the whole Jewish matriarch thing.'

'Really? I thought she was pretty liberal?'

'About everything except her children, I think. I've met her a couple of times at Shul. My dad's quite observant even though mom is a shiksa. The heart wants what the heart wants, right? That's what dad says.'

'Yeah. Right. Even when it's trouble.'

'Ain't that the truth' Brian sighs.

Will gets them to set the table and they eat, first a miso soup with mushrooms, then soba with braised tofu in a stew of vegetables. For dessert there is fruit or mochi. Will didn't make them he'd found them in the local town. He was surprised there was a whole Japanese food section (three shelves, it's a small store, in a small town). But after he was told about Japanese fishermen on some of the local crews he was less surprised. Where the fishermen go the food must be.

Then they experiment with different teas. All but Will giving in to the lure of decent coffee, he sticks with green matcha. After they've eaten they wash up bowls and cups and spoons. He talks about making some buns and dumplings for the following day. So the three of them chop vegetables whilst he makes pastry and other fillings. Bev is reminded of cooking she has done with her grandmother. Especially the smell of plum. She sighs happily.

Eventually, after a long drive and a long week they go to bed. There are three bathrooms so Will putters around until the communal one is empty and he then showers and sits in the bath to soak. He is reading the Tale of Genji by Shikubu. Just before he stretches out on his mattress he texts Hannibal

Hey, Hannibal, everyone got here safely. All very tired. Which makes me wonder how you are? I hope you will come up. Tuesday or Wednesday, whichever suits you. In an unexpected turn up for the books my dad is going to come on Monday! And stay until Wednesday! I'm as surprised as anyone - more when I see you. I haven't seen him for maybe 12 years. So it will be interesting. I've told him about the cabin. That may be why he wanted to come. The cabin is heaven. Thank you. Come and join me in paradise. Will

Will. Astounding! If your father is to come I will certainly endeavour to overlap with him. Two Graham men sounds like an intoxicating combination. Is he at all like you? Though you may not know. I'm glad you like the cabin. It belongs to a dear family friend. I'll introduce you to her some day. My aunt by marriage was Japanese and I have a strong connection through her to the country. I learnt Japanese before I learnt English! I send my warm wishes to the science team, and to you. Hannibal Lecter

Will smiles as he reads it that for all he tells Hannibal he knows no one else named Hannibal, he never fails to append his surname. The thing with his dad was an impromptu invitation. A few weeks after he shot Hobbs Beau had phoned him to find out how he was.

He'd seen the coverage in the press, or one of his siblings had told their father, or something. Anyway he and Beau ended up speaking on several occasions, has had warm and friendly conversations, slightly to Will's surprise and then this opportunity arose. He can't come for longer because of work but at least he can come. And he likes the sound of the cabin very much.

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Hannibal is glad that Beau is proving so amenable. When Hannibal located him, just after the Hobbs shooting, he hummed and haaed about intruding on Will's already complex life. Eventually he decided he already was, so a little more might just add to the interest! He'd barely had to do anything other than suggest it might be supportive for Beau to get in touch. And after this simple push it's all worked our rather well. When he last spoke with Beau they agree that they will keep Hannibal out of the set up altogether. Better for everyone. By then Beau is mildly interested in who exactly Hannibal is in Will's life so he's willing to play along a little.

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Saturday is good. So good. They each wake according to need. When Will hears the first sounds of alertness he brings tea to each of them and a small cake. Brian thinks he might actually cry. Usually there is no one to look after him. At home he's basically alone. And sometimes desperately lonely. He tries very hard not to lean too hard on Bev and Jimmy and now Will.

He knows he's a little shit, he's trying harder now not to be. He knows he's made a couple of bad choices recently and he knows at some point he is going to have to fess up. They might hate him then. He swallows his tea. Better make the most of his friends whilst he still has them. He faintly wonders if he might have to change jobs or leave when they find out. Now he definitely wants to cry. He's been an idiot. He sighs instead and goes to join the others.

Breakfast is a kind of rice porridge with some stewed fruit. Maybe plums. Will is continuing the Japanese theme. He's gathered the ingredients to make green tea ice cream as part of lunch. He's following a recipe but it's intriguing the others, so he wonders if he can make something else to go with it. Maybe plum sorbet? He hums to himself. He quite likes doing the whole provider thing. And it's rare enough that he is up to it, for himself let alone anyone else.

'Ok. So this morning we could go for a walk? By the sea? Or inland a bit, there's some nice woods. Or we could save that for this afternoon? And the rest of the time I've found some board games - there's a Japanese monopoly! Set in Tokyo. Or scrabble, in English, can you imagine how many tiles you'd need for Japanese! There's cards, Go, ordinary chess, twister though I'm not sure if we can all manage that! (Everyone laughs ruefully), we can all cook, or sleep or make stuff or whatever you like really! Or read. Or get Bev to teach us Hello Kitty Japanese.'

The group look at each other. Two days in effect to do what they like. With no dead things, or evidence, or Jack breathing down their necks. They hardly know what to do with themselves.

'I vote for lazy morning with books, or cooking lunch or at least pretending that Will isn't doing it all, and walk this afternoon. And maybe take out for dinner? And then monopoly which I promise not to humiliate you all at'

'I'll have you know Beverly Katz that I have never lost a game of Monopoly in my life'

'So far Jimmy! So far. You wait'

'How's that sound then?'

'Can anyone play Go, I'd like to learn?'

'I can, I learnt at college'

'So, Brian teaches Jimmy Go, Bev pretends to be literary and helps in the kitchen, I'll make lunch with Bev's help and then with whichever one of you gives up on Go first or loses, the victor gets to set the table and have a quick tidy up?'

Sounds perfect.

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After lunch they get kitted up for the outdoors. It's still summer but the weather is squally this close to the coast and this far up. In the end they opt for a beach walk. Collecting sand glass, shells, bits of wood for a fire.

There's an irori in the living room which has a lift up removable hatch above it. Will guesses it's only used occasionally hence the hatch which make the room just a simple open living space. The location of the hatch was only visible because of the unusual arrangement of the tatami. When he lifted a square one and found the hatch he wondered at first if it was into a cellar. But then he found the sand lined sunken hearth. He's read up on them over the last week. The idea of having a fire indoors is an attractive one though he is rather worried about a fire combined with straw, wood and paper. Maybe if it's very tiny? Or maybe they'll just use the iron brazier outside? Probably safer. Stick with the hibachi indoors.

They sit on a breaker and drink tea from a vacuum flask. Will hands out steamed buns with fruit filling. They all look out across the pebbly beach and greyish sea. Eat their bun, drink their tea.

'Is Dr Lecter coming up then?'

'Not until Tuesday or Wednesday. But he'll overlap with my dad, which I think is nice'

'Wow. Meeting the in laws already!'

Will side eyes Jimmy 'hardly. But maybe it's better like this. You know. Before there is anything, if there ever is anything, yeah yeah, I admit it.' He holds his hands up as if in surrender. The other three grin at him.

'Hasn't he signed you off though?'

'Sort of. Though Jack asked him to keep seeing me for a bit. So not exactly completely signed off properly. Just the first formal bit. So, fuzzy boundaries'

'Can we make that sound just a bit kinky?'

'If you like Bev, though it's not especially, mostly it's just a bit confusing. I feel like I'm probably giving out slightly mixed signals, and possibly getting some back, but I don't know if that's just me, or him too.'

'Yet another example of the 'curse of the empath'?'

Will smiles. It's hard to explain how complicated it is for him to tell what his own feelings are if others are emoting strongly around him, or what their feelings are if his are heightened, they might be projected and reflected back for all he knows. If he knows someone really well it's easier to tell as he can sort of exclude their default settings. It's one of the things that's restful about Hannibal. He basically doesn't transmit very much at all, which gives Will a chance to sort out his own feelings. Except that more recently, he has been. And Will is now a bit more confused about what is genuinely Hannibal and what is him projecting or hoping!

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Less than half a mile away on the coast road a small beat up imported car is resting in a parking space that looks over the beach. There are four people in it. The man is using a pair of binoculars to look at the quartet in the distance.

'I'm pretty sure that's them. I don't recognise one of the men. The girl and the bloke are definitely the two from the cabin. And the fourth is Graham. Em showed me the photo so I know what he looks like. And it's a bit far away for these things but I'm like 80% sure it's them.'

'I don't understand why goggles is never alone! I thought you said he was a bit of a weirdo. So how come he's always hanging out with people?'

'He was on his own for the first two days. Whilst he was just pottering around. Impossible to predict he'd have company'

'Yeah. I suppose it's the weekend and they like have jobs and stuff'

'He might be alone during the week then, like the last few days?'

'I think so.'

'Shall we wait for then?'

'Probably best'

'Alright. Shall we go back to the trailer then? It's boring just sitting around waiting for them to do nothing'

'Yeah, they live really Boring lives. They were just sitting round reading and talking and shit last night.'

'Really?'

'What a waste of time'

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You're sure of a big surprise

Chapter Summary

> Team Sassy Science go home. Will's dad arrives. Two Graham's! Almost a s'more! The cannibal cohort do a bit of stalking.

Sunday passes in much the same way as Saturday but without the devastating monopoly game, that they reluctantly agree was a draw between Bev and Jimmy. And that was only so they could avoid pistols at dawn. Or whatever the 21st century equivalent is - World of Warcraft at dawn? Magic? Agricola? Although all three might compound the issue. The cake is a lie after all.

Instead they spend the evening following various recipe books and making sushi, noodles and katsu, and sorbets. As they cook and roll and mould they discuss the Hobbs case. And the potential fall out. Jimmy raises the interesting issue of how they've all assumed that Abigail has gone voluntarily. What if she is still a pawn? In someone else's scheme? That gives them all pause. After all it isn't impossible.

Bev and Zeller give a blow by blow account of each meeting they conveyor belted through, each one involving senior FBI personnel with pursed lips and narrowed eyes. Both of them held the line, they were solid, they did their jobs, they acted righteously. And there are only so many ways you can say that again and again. And because Abigail was officially still a patient she was in Dr Bloom's charge. And Dr Bloom is still in hospital, her mother repelling all boarders. So they've squeaked through. For now at least.

If anyone is carrying the overflowing shit can (hmm nice image) it's Jack. He didn't clear either Beverly or Zeller for the overnights and he'd kept the whole enterprise off the books. Alana and Hannibal were likewise invisible as far as the FBI were concerned. Which is all fine in theory because senior agents do this all the time, until something goes wrong. Then it's an official mess of an unofficial op. That the two 'consultants' were hurt, one of them badly is a disaster.

It's the kind of disaster that can break careers. Jimmy can't think of a worse incident in the last ten years. When he laughingly says they should all 'DUCK' Bev shouts 'how low?' And that says it all really. It isn't even funny but they laugh none the less in the manner of friends and desperate co-workers everywhere who may or may not have avoided some kind of disciplinary action. And though it's not really fun to pass the buck, the senior agents do get paid the big bucks!

By the end of the night they've talked themselves out and all that remains is the drive home. They're kind of a bit deflated, the case, the end of a good weekend, the prospect of the week

ahead. Will puts together a packed late night snack and a flask of tea. How nice it is to look after our friends, be looked after by them.

Zeller is still thinking desperately about how to explain what he's done. As soon as Bev gets the results back from trace they'll know he did a deal with the devil, aka Freddie Lounds. Shit. Or as Bev would say double shit, maybe also with bells on.

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Late that night Will makes himself a final drink. He misses the dogs, especially now all the people have gone. He's not sure how the dogs would fit here, the matting, the low level art and bonsai, but he appreciates that Hannibal offered. He thinks about Hannibal. It's getting close to two months.

Will runs his cup across his lips. He's holding the cup in front of his face nestled in two hands, the steam from the drink warms his cheeks and nose as he moves it from side to side, the minor imperfections in the surface of the cup catching his lips. Sensitive. He misses Hannibal. And how did that happen so fast? He's had relationships before that have started and ended in less time it's true. But.

Will is usually so unsure of his own feelings that others have got bored and decided he can't commit, or won't, or something, or is too distant, or won't be dependent, or is too dependent. This time, if this is a 'this time' he's better able to describe what's happening and what his needs are. He hopes that will be enough, make a big enough difference overall. These few days have been helpful. Even though he can see the others have had a bad time, have had to pay a price.

It's quite late and although he and Hannibal regularly talk this late maybe given what has happened it's too late? Maybe if Hannibal wanted to talk he'd call? They call each other about equally. Will tries hard to think about what Hannibal would like. Given that it's Sunday night. He hums to himself. He's overthinking it. Damn. That means it's stopped being just the natural thing he'd do. If he calls now it will all be stilted. He's getting fuzzy. He puts his cell down disappointed with himself. No matter what kind of hard time others give him he always gives himself a harder time.

The cell buzzes with a text

Will, good evening. I realise it might be too late to call, but I thought to enquire about how your weekend has passed. Are you well? If it would please you, a phone conversation would be a balm. But not if you are beyond that. I understand the load that extended socialising can place on you. So I would understand if it is not desirable at this time. Warmly, yours, Hannibal Lecter

At first Will misreads it as 'warmly yours' and his heart does a big flip. Then he flushes as blood rushes to his face and cock simultaneously. He's glad no one can see, as he quickly palms himself to discourage the attention seeking going on down below.

He replies almost immediately, not knowing that the sound of his desire will carry like honey in his voice

'Ok, hey. I just want to say first of all that I wasn't staring at the phone willing it to ring. But I have just been overthinking myself into a corner about whether I should call you! So it's great you texted. I really hope you always do even if I'm losing the plot. Ok. I'll stop talking now, hello Hannibal how are you?'

(Shit did I just call him Hannibal, have I done that before, I think I have? Just act normal Will. Ok. As normal as you can, oh, heck, you know what? Never mind)

'Will, it is lovely to hear your voice. Possibly it is better to overthink than underthink, though I'm not sure you ever do that?'

Will laughs, and they settle into the familiar humorous and intelligent conversation they've both come to find nourishing and soothing. After half an hour or so, neither of them counting, they ring off with good wishes for Will's dad's arrival and for Hannibal's next few days of patients. Will puts the phone down a little delirious with gladness. God he likes this guy.

Back in Baltimore Hannibal puts his phone down. So. Beau will arrive tomorrow and with any luck he will travel late Tuesday night. For a moment he pauses. His last Patient on a Tuesday is Franklyn. Hmm. Hannibal knows that if this particular clingy patient picks up any hint of frustration on Hannibal's part he will have to expend an extra forty minutes or so soothing his particular brand of neuroses, sorrows, dependencies and tics. If he thinks Hannibal has plans after the appointment he has been known to throw a minor fit of hysteria effectively thwarting Hannibal's evening.

He practices stilling himself for a further thirty minutes. The practice of a discipline like this in times of bounty make it much easier to slip into in times of adversity. He thinks about what he might also take with him and makes a mental list. He'll pack tomorrow. He thinks of whether there is anything Will might like him to bring. He thinks about the sound of Will's voice. Its sweetness fills his veins as he slips into sleep.

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In the trailer, the next day, the little cohort of conflict don't wake up until almost noon. Shit. How did that get away from them so quick? They've missed a whole morning. Fuck knows what Graham is doing. Em gets up, grabs a cold pop tart and jumps in the beater. Ten minutes later it's clear that Graham isn't in the cabin. Damn, fuck. Shit. Em decides to take a chance and gets closer to the cabin peering in through the windows. Ok. It's not all bad Graham's stuff is still here - clothes, books, shoes, a tablet, a charger, a blank board and a paint brush. Ok. Em takes a deep breath. It's not a disaster wherever Graham is he's coming back. In the mud room the washing machine is juddering away so that probably means that Graham will return soon. Would he just leave it running? Em moves the car somewhere less obtrusive and settles in to wait. The others can get stuffed. It's their fault.

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By midday, Will is in the car he hired from the local garage and has parked it at the bus station of the nearest big town with a Greyhound service. He waits, leaning on the the bonnet of the car, ready for his dad. When Beau Graham steps down of the long distance bus Will knows him immediately. He's slightly smaller than Will all round but he's the same colouring

and face shape and nose. So clearly his dad, or an uncle at a push, though he carries his years well. His dad is somewhere north of sixty he reckons. And looking good. Denim jeans, suede jacket. Castro cap. Maybe boots too.

Beau sees him almost straight away and walks over to his son and drops his bag and hugs him. Will is surprised, how often does he get hugged? Not often and this is his dad. He gulps and hugs him back. Picks up his dad's bag. He gestures to the car and the two men walk over to it. Will isn't quite sure where to start.

'So. Ok I have this idea we could go fishing tomorrow if you'd like? Today Lunch first and then this afternoon I thought maybe the town, get something to eat later, and just, err, hang out. Do you have anything particular you'd like?'

'Sure thing. Time with you. What ever that looks like. I'll take it gladly! Actually there's a maritime place in the town maybe we could get that in this afternoon. Fishing sounds great. You bring rods?'

'Yeah dad. I did. Do you want to go out on one of the boats? It's a bit late but there are still a few charters?'

'River for preference, you?'

'Yeah. Me too. Great'

'Grub now though. Buses make me hungry'

Will laughs. He doesn't remember his dad being this easy, but then he certainly wasn't either. So it's maybe both of them that are different. They get in the car and drive back to the smaller sleepier place near the cabin. His dad takes great lungfuls of air the nearer the coast they get.

'I love the smell of the sea, even with diesel and fish guts, smells like home, smells like possibility. And drowning.'

'Gee. You're still pretty chirpy Will'

'It's what you used to say, when we were little'

'Really? Shit. I was a fucker then. I take it all back. You weren't the weird one! It was me'

They both laugh. Will snorts a little and says 'it's ok, I am a bit weird, one particular kind of crazy, but sometimes a useful kind'

'You going to talk about it to me our would you rather not? I read some of the stuff about the Hobbs bloke and the girl. Sounded like they made you a hero just so they could stamp on you later?'

'It felt like that. At least in the press if not in the FBI. It's actually worse now. Not so much for me as I've been here the last week. I'll tell you over lunch. It's complicated. Sort of. Maybe.'

Beau reaches over and tousles his son's hair. It's curlier and longer than his. More like his mom's. Will's weirdness was always a bit like his mom's too. She had a way of seeing stuff. His boy. All grown up. He looks him over from the luxury of the passenger seat. He almost never is a passenger so this is nice. His son looks good, a bit tired, but good, handsome even, dressed in the same kind of gear he wears. He's got good hands. He wears glasses which makes him smile, it makes him look smart.

His boy.

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'What do you think this is meant to be?'

'I think it might be a mermaid?'

'Oh. One of those Nineteenth century things? Made from a fish and a monkey?'

'Maybe. I can't see the join.'

'Weird'

'People are. Again and again. Always and for ever. We should fit right in. How you doing with that? Fitting in? I know New Orleans was hard.'

'It's good actually. Nice. I've got some good friends here. Some of them were along for the weekend, gone back to work now, friends from the University and the city too. You'll meet one of them maybe tomorrow or possibly Wednesday before you go. Hannibal. I'd like to say you'll like him but actually I have no idea!'

'How's that then?'

'Well. Psychiatrist (his dad snorts, see!), wears formal suits a lot, three pieces. European (his dad laughs out loud), likes opera (like you then, Will smiles), art, museums, theatre.'

'Ok. All round renaissance man then?'

'Yes. Six languages, though I've never asked about Latin and Greek.'

'You should. You were still doing Latin at High a School. I remember the text book where you coloured in the Mediterranean Sea I think it was Caesar's conquests or something'

'I'd forgotten that. Sort of. I might have still got the book. I've a lot of books. We should fix for you to come to Wolf Trap'

'I'd like that. Meet some of your non renaissance friends.'

'They all are dad! Just not necessarily the 16th century Italian version'

'Now you're just being a smart arse'

.....

When Will and Beau arrive back at the cabin Will has a sense that something is different. He looks out of the windows across the back garden and realises that the difference is a bird feeder has been knocked off its hook. It means there's light that comes in that bounces off a mirror where it hadn't before. He unlocks the door and slides it open and picks up the feeder and hangs it back up.

He goes back inside and closes the door and locks it. He goes into the kitchen. Starts coffee off. He's given his dad one of the spaces that overlooks the koi pond and tiny stone lantern pagoda beside it. He's mentally reserved the space opposite the living room that overlooks the side garden as Hannibal's when he gets here. His is effectively off a third corner of the living area overlooking the other end of the pond and a stand of Japanese maple. In different colours. He thinks it's the nicest room so is willing to swop if either his dad or Hannibal would prefer it.

'How's the room? Do you want to try the others, you can have whichever one you like?'

'This is great thanks. You got an extra blanket. I tend to sleep cold?'

'Perfect. I sleep hot you can have at least one of mine.' Will brings back a quilt. 'Here you go'

His dad looks at him and smiles and then turns back to the garden 'whose car is that out the very back?'

Will looks. 'I don't know. Maybe one of the neighbours, maybe. I haven't walked up that road. Why?'

'It thought I could see someone in it. You seen anyone hanging around?'

'I don't think so. The feeder was knocked over though. So maybe someone came to look in the windows?'

'Maybe. Make sure you keep your doors locked son. I know in your line of work you know it, but there are some not so nice people out there. And sometimes it seems you've only got to look funny at someone and they pull a gun on you. Though probably a gun isn't the worst you've seen.'

'You're right there are some very disturbed and disturbing people out there. Do you want coffee or tea or something else?'

'I brought chicory with me?'

'Ok. I've not had that for years. Lets give it a go.'

.....

In the cafe/bar late in the evening Beau is in the rest room taking his time, Will is casually reading a magazine his father bought when someone sits down opposite him.

'Hey. How're you then? You back for seconds?'

It's the takeout flirter from last week.

'A guy's gotta eat, and this is good eating'

Em looks at Will appraisingly and leans forward 'I know what else is good eating' and winks.

Will flushes very slightly. That wasn't what he'd meant. He certainly hadn't meant it as encouragement.

'Err. Are you waiting for take out?'

'Only if you want to go somewhere more private than this, for your dinner' another wink. It's not subtle and it still feels like a game. Will's dad comes back and raises his eyebrows at the interloper. 'Whose your friend boy?'

'Me? Oh I'm Em. I live near by. Just saying hello. Being friendly like. This one taken then?' Will feels mildly affronted, on both his dad's and his own behalf.

'He's my son. The biological kind, not the kink fest kind. Though if that's your thing I could help you out.' Beau does an excellent impression of a leering older man. Since he is older it's perhaps not such a stretch. But the face he makes doesn't quite fit the role he's aiming for. He relaxes and pokes Will in the ribs. 'Oscar material?'

'Definitely, Golden Globes too, maybe a raspberry as well'

'Oh you're no fun'

'True story. They say you inherit your sense of humour'

'Ah you got me there boy'

Em looks at them both. Face slightly souring, feeling slightly laughed at maybe. 'Yeah, yeah, funny guy. No harm in asking though is there? You look cute together, if I was into a three way I'd do you both.'

Em saunters off leaving the two Graham men gaping slightly. Beau looks at Will

'Meet your son, they say; it'll be nice, they say; haven't seen him for years, a catch up is good they say; get propositioned for a three way with someone young enough to be my grandkid and my actual child, says no-one ever. What the merry fuck was that?'

'I don't know. It's a bit weird. I was sitting here last week and they just dropped in the seat and started a conversation. I'm glad you were here just then, it was already weird. It did get weirder though. I'm cute but not that cute. Am I?'

'Only if you were five years younger and clearly rich I'd say'

'That's what I thought. Ok. Dessert?'

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'Yeah, alright. It's a bit crap. His dad is here. I just saw them in town. I didn't get to find out how long for.'

'Shit. How do you know it's his dad?'

'The looking just like him but twenty years older but no glasses was the give away'

'Alright then. So what do we do? Just wait to see if his dad leaves and he's on his own again or what?'

'Yeah. Maybe. Maybe we could create a little surprise for them up here. Maybe get a little chaos going? Then split the weak ones off. Doesn't have to be Graham. Though he's my favourite. He'd look so pretty all stabbed.'

'Ok. Lets give that some thought.'

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In the night Will's dad hears Will get up and try and go out the back patio doors. Beau gets up and speaks to his son and realises he's sleepwalking. His mom did it too when she was stressed. Will did it very occasionally as a child. Usually in intervals of concentrated activity. He goes to Will and circles his wrist not tightly just enough to tug a little, he pulls him back to Will's futon and carefully uses the sash from his robe to tie his ankle to one corner of the wooden base. It won't hold him completely but enough for there to be more noise if he tries again. He feels Will's head. It's too hot. He gets a cold flannel and lays it over his son's forehead. And sits beside him and thinks until he hears Will's breathing become the rhythm of sleep and not the hitched mess of a sleepwalker.

In the morning when Will wakes he discovers the tie and is momentarily embarrassed. His dad smiles at him as he comes into the kitchen. 'You're my boy. And I love you.'

Will looks at him and then takes his dad's cup and puts it down and hugs his father. His father hugs back tightly. His little lad.

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By the time the two Graham men arrive back in the early evening they have caught fish and found out more about each other over the gap of the last, what, twenty years or so? They've had an excellent day. It's been like a re-discovery. And a good one. Will might not connect to the concept of family but he gets the idea of having a dad. He likes it. This feels like the start of something, not a way marker on a road less travelled in the past and future.

They clean the fish, roast them with potatoes, garlic, rosemary and lemon. Some carrot and squash too. Will does a quick tidy up round the house. Whether Hannibal arrives tonight or tomorrow Will wants him to know he is looking after the cabin. Appreciates it properly.

'Are you nervous about your friend coming?'

'Hmm? No. well. Not really. The cabin belongs to a fiend of his I haven't met. They've leant it to me for the two weeks. Which is amazingly nice. I thought I ought to offer rent or something. But apparently it'd be empty otherwise so they're willing for me to use it and to have friends here. They were willing to have the dogs apparently.'

'How many dogs have you got Will'

'Err. Seven?'

Beau laughs long and hard. 'Your friend must be very persuasive! Seven dogs, in this pristine place?'

'I know, right?'

'Has he got a thing for you then?'

Will makes a sort of bemused face. 'Do you know, I'm not really sure. I think he likes me a bit. Originally he was the FBI appointed psych doing an evaluation on me for field work. Now we just seem to get along. Nice to make a friend. Wow dad I have' he starts to count them off 'Bev, Alana, Brian, Jimmy, Hannibal, Jack (when I don't want to kill him for trying to kill me), the stalker in the cafe, you, and five lab interns all on the friend spectrum. And lots of other colleagues too.'

'My popular boy. Make me more coffee.'

'Coming right up.'

.....

Outside in the car at the back of the property on the other side of the ring fence and the trees Em and Abigail are sitting drinking the end of a six pack of beers between them.

'What are they doing now?'

'They seem to be sitting and reading and talking.' Abigail adjusts the binoculars. The only way they can see anything is because there are lights in the cabin and no curtains. She can see Will's dad has a crossword book and Will seems to be reading something about cabins.

He's a strange guy. But she sort of envies that he seems to get on with his dad. When they'd met she thought he was the kind of person who was abandoned at birth and never knew love. So he was both desperate for it in all the wrong places and didn't recognise it either. Now she's not so sure. He and his dad seem to laugh and be happy around each other. Relaxed. Maybe he's not so screwed up after all. She starts to think about the possibility of a longer play.

'Em, I've got an idea. But Cassie won't like it for sure, and Nick might be a bit of a problem too.'

'Mostly I love your ideas Abs, I'm all ears.'

'Good. Now. About that...'

Beneath the trees where nobody sees

Chapter Summary

> Stalking, a gruesome murder, and some general shittyness. Will's dad is a sassy muffin, Hannibal is a dish. Em is a shit. But we knew that.

In Baltimore Hannibal is tidying his office. His final patient, Franklyn Froideveaux has just left. Hannibal, in the end, decided he would opt for taking time to save time. He gave Franklyn 100% of his attention for the full hour. Listened. Made careful thoughtful interjections. Listened some more. Expressed no great degree of exasperated patience. Just careful moderated responses. Franklyn seems to have done well on it. Hannibal ruefully regrets his own complicity in Franklyn's normal lack of progress. He takes a deep breath. He has a long drive ahead but at the end something desirable is waiting.

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'Dad, Hannibal just texted, he reckons he's about half way here. He's currently stopped at a diner for coffee. Do you want to wait up or go to bed now?'

'What are your doing?'

'Oh I'll wait.'

'Do you mind the company?'

'No. not at all. That'd be nice actually. Can we do a crossword together?'

'Yeah. Course. You want to fill it in so I can lie back and look wise with my eyes closed?'
'Great. So, do you want a difficult one or one that builds vocabulary?'

'You can choose. Don't tell me for the first few clues. See if I can work it out'

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'It's a good plan Abs. It's a long play though. Do you think we can do it? Nick would be alright, but he's better used this way. But I'm not sure I trust Cassie. And we still need to nab Graham.'

'What if we take him later? We don't have to do it all now. How about first of all I just go back. Then we fuck with him a little. Confuse him maybe. See if we can set him up a bit? If we do Cassie here we can find a way to tie him to it, for sure. I've got a few ideas.'

'Ok. So, we do Cassie, maybe tomorrow? Put her somewhere? That'll set the hares running. Then you can turn up and say Nick kidnapped you. And killed his sister. And then you ran for it, maybe you could say you stabbed him. In self defence. What about that? Closer to the truth maybe?'

'Yeah. I like that. But lets make like he got away a bit. Or something. Or. Oh. I've got an idea. What if we wind Nick up to try and hurt me and Graham is there? And he has to rescue me again? I could still hurt him or Nick in self defence and he'd be a witness. Oh my god that would be amazing. I could get on the inside again. What do you think?'

Em just smiles. Nastily.

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Outside Will hears the sound of the Bentley. His dad is sort of semi snoozing when Will lays a hand on his shoulder gently. His dad makes a snuffling snort. 'Wassat? I'm awake'

'Good, dad. I think Hannibal is here. I'll go and help him with bags. Will you put some water on?'

'Yes. Sure. What? Oh right. Sorry. Wasn't asleep. Much'

Will goes to the front door and down the steps to greet Hannibal. It's not been part of their repertoire before but somehow it seems completely normal that they'd briefly embrace each other hello. 'Ok? How was the drive?'

'The arrival makes it worthwhile. Here will you take these?' Hannibal hands him a bag and box. He slings the bag over his arm and can then get both hands round the box.

Hannibal pulls another bag and two large cotton shopping bags out of the trunk. Smiles at Will

'Shall we?'

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Half an hour later it is beyond the witching hour. Hannibal has been fed and watered and agreed to his room happily (it's the one he usually uses in the autumn because of the sweet chestnut outside the window). Shopping has been unpacked. Hannibal adjusting to how Will is using the kitchen. And of course Beau and Hannibal have been introduced. That's gone entertainingly well. They haven't even ganged up against Will. Yet!

Another forty minutes and it's clear Hannibal is fading. Beau isn't an idiot so he makes himself scarce once they've agreed on a 9:00 ish breakfast.

Will smiles at Hannibal, 'I'm glad you've come. How is your head?'

'I think a few days of not much excitement will be refreshing'

'the cheek! Are you saying I'm unexciting!?'

'Dear Will. Not in the slightest.'

'I know. I'm being unkind. You've had a long journey. Do you want anything for bed, water maybe?'

Hannibal smiles, looking down at the floor. He knows what he'd really like is to be held long and close. Smothered by Will's care. Perhaps catching something of this in the way Hannibal says and expresses nothing Will comes around the counter and carefully pulls Hannibal closer and puts his arms quietly around him. Hannibal lets his head rest on Will's shoulder for a few moments. The moment extends. Neither of them wanting to move. Eventually, Hannibal, perhaps thinking of the ways in which this might not be such a good idea, lifts his head and smiles again as Will lets go. 'Thank you' is all he says.

When Will eventually turns off all the lights in the house and shuts curtains and blinds he sees that the car at the back of the property is just moving off. Strange. Perhaps he'll go and look tomorrow.

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Breakfast is a jovial affair. Hannibal demonstrates a clever egg trick which earns him applause and everyone omelette. As that's about all that the eggs are good for after the trick! They drink coffee. Eat jam on toast brioche. Laugh. Hannibal finds himself liking Beau. He can also see that if this is the way that Will will age it will be a fine thing to watch unfold.

When Will goes to the bathroom Beau turns to Hannibal and says 'I'm not going tell him that you got in touch. Unless you ever need to. But I want to say that it's given me the greatest gift of the second half of my life. Will's mom was the first half. That didn't turn out so well. But Will.' He gets tears in his eyes as he struggles to say what's in his heart, things that would normally be strangled at birth, as unaccustomed as he is to uttering such words. Hannibal waits. 'Will. I didn't know what it would be like. But it's good. Really good. Thank you. I'm very grateful. If I can do anything for you. Just say. Anything. Ever.'

Hannibal smiles at him and nods. 'I hoped. I'm glad for both of you. That's it's turned out so well. Of course Will was the priority for me, as he is my friend. But now I see how it is I'm glad on your behalf as well. I'm glad that my meddling has helped two people find their way back to each other. Very glad. I hope we shall be friends too. Will is..' for a moment Hannibal tries to think of a way to explain all the myriad ways in which Will is important to him. Some of them he definitely can't say to the man's father only a few hours after they've met. He stops instead. Will coming back into the room, saving them both from further confessions.

They both turn and smile at Will still shaking his hands. He looks at them both 'what? Wait? What?' He narrows his eye. 'If you're ganging up on me?'

'Not at all' says Hannibal, 'Totally' says his father, at the same time. All three men laugh.

'You two better get your stories straight, or there'll be trouble! What we doing next, dad when's the bus?'

'Half past three. So we got time for serious hanging around, mooching, looking at stuff, I saw a couple of junk shops, we could call it antiquing if that sounds better?' He doesn't look at Hannibal in the most pointed way. Who is indeed amused.

'I'd be glad to cook lunch and make you something to take on the bus'

'Will, does the man cook? Where did you find him because I want one'

Will looks very mildly embarrassed and a tint of rose stains his cheeks, just at the edges. His dad looks at him and takes pity.

'Hannibal how about we all go food shopping, then Will and I will look at tat whilst you think, I dunno, noble thoughts of the old country. Then we'll be under cooks, and you can boss us, or rather Will whilst I watch and make amusing commentary. We'll eat lunch, I'll be very complimentary and then I'll pack and you can put the old geezer on the bus and breathe a sigh of relief.'

'I see nothing with which to argue' Hannibal manages to convert the hint of a smirk at Beau's self description 'Will?'

'Great. Hannibal you must know the shops here?'

'I do, there are also one or two people I would like to pay my respects to, if they are currently in residence. I've been coming to this house for almost 25 years. So I have a number of friends near by. I won't need to fit them all in today. But certainly before we leave, in particular if I see one I must try and see them all'

Beau and Will laugh 'we've got family like that!'

The three men put on coats and shoes and lock up the house behind them. Will notices the car isn't there now. Hmm.

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After some successful ventures in various shops both Will and Beau are acting as porters for Hannibal. He does indeed know some of the locals, in all the shops. And is warmly welcomed. It's almost as though their friendship suddenly makes sense of Will's presence as he's now extended the same warm familiarity. Nice. Accepting. Interesting.

After the shopping Will and Beau head for the three 'antique' shops that the town sustains. Hannibal is going to see the mother of the woman who looks after the cabin. They'd bumped into Indigo in town and she said her mother hoped he'd have the time. The men agree to rendezvous back at the cabin at 12:00.

In the first shop Will and his father walk around and realise quickly it's slightly out of their league. Though Will finds a lino cut of a koi just six by five inches which he rather likes. It's a little rough round the edge so the price is ok. He thinks he could matte it and frame it and give it to Hannibal as a thank you for driving him, feeding him, arranging the cabin. He asks his dad. Who nods.

As they walk round the second shop Beau finds a box of small motors, from clockwork toys mainly, maybe from the inside of talking dolls, the whole box is forty dollars so Beau goes to haggle with the guy. He has the idea for a motorised mobile of cranes, not the mechanical, kind the flying kind. One of the books that he looked at yesterday was an origami book, he photographed the instructions for paper cranes. He has just a faint idea of getting some fancy paper and making something to send Will. In the post with fish and cranes. He can see it in his mind's eye.

As they walk to the third shop, both pleased with their purchases Beau asks 'so. I like Hannibal. He seems alright. Are your other friends as nice as him?'

'Yeah. Dad. I know. Amazing. Here I am maybe middle of my life and I finally seem to be getting at least some of it right! They're great actually. We should definitely fix a time for you to come down. I'd like you to see the house.'

'Do you want to come to me some time. I could get the others other. They're not like you'. He pauses. 'I'll deny it if you ever say this to any of them but you were and are by far my favourite. So I don't mind at all if you'd rather not. If they weren't my kids I'd probably see almost zero of them it's mostly for the grandchildren. It's not their fault.'

Will looks at him 'I didn't know I was an uncle?'

'Oh yeah. Seven times over'

Will goggles at the enormity. 'Ok. That's a surprise. Maybe one family member is enough for now. I know there are cousins and cousins of cousins. But nephews and nieces never occurred to me'

His dad smiles wryly. 'I tell you some of them are monsters, not your kind, but right tearaways. And then I think about what I was like or their parents. And I keep my big fat mouth shut.'

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Lunch is something French creole, Hannibal manages it without too much fanfare, nevertheless he catches a look between Beau and Will and knows he's been spotted showing off. In a happy moment he realises he doesn't care in the slightest and simply points a knife rudely at Beau and says 'I saw that!' Beau just waggles his eyebrows back with his mouth full.

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At the bus stop Will hugs Beau for so long the bus driver gets itchy. Beau shakes Hannibal's hand and then half hugs him, to the surprise of both of them. He gets onto the bus and presses his face against the window like a small child outside a sweet shop making faces. Will can't help laughing. Ridiculous! His dad.

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In the car driving back to the cabin Hannibal glances at Will 'happy?' 'Very, thank you.'

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In the trailer things are not so good. Albeit that this is Em and Abigail's intention the arguments have got pretty awful this morning and afternoon. In the end Nick is so pissed off he takes the car he and Abigail stole and drives off saying he'll be back after he's had time to cool off.

At first Cassie looks smug. When she realises that the other two had been angling for this she gets more nervous.

'Lets go for a drive Cass'

'I don't think I want to. I'm going to wait for Nick'

'No. you're coming for a drive. You too Abs'

'What. Oh must I. Oh alright. God. What a drag'

Cassie gets in the front next to Em. Abigail sits behind Cassie. They drive away from the trailer park and head inland. Eventually finding a road that leads into a stand of government forest. Em checked this place out last week. There are sometimes cars here but often not. It's a tiny risk. But what's life without some risk. When they arrive at the car park Em gets out some bolt cutters from the trunk and Ab lifts a bag out that's clearly heavy. Cassie is more nervous now.

'Where are we going?'

'You see the info centre? It's closed now, but we thought this would be a good place to bring Graham, you know, once we...'

'Oh, right, yeah. Good'

Cassie is relieved. They've talked about this, this makes more sense now. 'Do you want me to carry anything?'

'Thanks, I'm good'

At the door Em strains against the bolt cutters to get the padlock off. It's an effort. It's a big padlock. Eventually though, it gives with a crack and they're in.

The place is like all info centres everywhere. Racks of leaflets, maps on the wall, some interesting objects. Here there's a giant stuffed stag's head. Abigail turns to Cassie.

'Help me get this down?'

They struggle together until Em comes and helps them. Once the head is on the floor they all take deep breaths to recover. It's bloody heavy. Abigail is bending over it as though looking at

something Cassie bends to look too. And Em just slips a wire round her neck and pulls. Tighter and tighter.

At first Cassie thinks it's a joke. Then she realises it's not and starts to panic. She using too much oxygen up too fast. She scrabbles at her neck, can't reach Em behind her. Abigail watches her curiously with her head on one side when Cassie stretches out her hand to her. Then she's slumping down. Em doesn't let go. This happened once before. They thought someone was dead when they weren't. That was a fuck up.

Cassie is definitely as close to death as damn it. The wire embedded in her neck. Abigail looks at Em. Good job. She pulls out Cassie's phone and takes a couple of pictures. Then they undress her, and as with Marissa virtually throw her onto the antlers of the stags head. Ideally this would be outside but this ain't bad. She takes a few more photos.

She looks in the bag, there's a good knife here somewhere. A fishing knife. Just a Buck. Everyone has those. She pushes hard down into Cassie's chest just below the end of the breast bone. She drags the knife along down her abdomen, skirting her navel. Blood wells up. She makes a lateral cut across the bottom of the ribs joining the vertical incision so it's a cross. She pulls back the four quarters. There's just enough room for her to get her hands inside and pull. Hard. She cuts connective tissue and veins and eventually the trachea to get the lungs out. She spends a bit of time trying for the heart too. She makes quite a mess. Eventually though she has the heart as well.

She holds her hands out to Em who pulls out cleaning wipes from the bag. They spend the next half an hour cleaning Abigail up. It doesn't matter about the mess on the floor, they triple bag the organs. They'll either eat them or chuck them. They'll burn her clothes later. Go to a local swim and gym for clean up. She picks up Cassie's phone again and takes some more photos. Next she looks up a number on her own phone and programmes it into Cassie's. Em looks a question at her 'sending it to Freddie Lounds. 'Right. Done' she cleans the phone off with a couple more wipes and then chucks it down in the middle of Cassie's body where her heart used to be. Nice.

Back in the trailer later they've burnt the clothes they were wearing. Dumped the lungs onto a great pile of rotting muck on the sea's edge, they're now covered with sea gulls. There won't be anything left in a day or two with the scuttling crabs and the birds, and maybe other scavengers around. The heart they've got with them. They'll eat it tonight. It all worked pretty well. If it carries on like this Freddie Lounds will be up here by tomorrow, the FBI not far behind and then it'll be part two.

Em wonders aloud about Graham, what he's doing. 'Why don't you go and see. Won't be any harm in it. Be friendly Em. You're good at that'

.....

'I liked your father very much, it seems you did too?'

Hannibal and Will are walking from the cabin into town. They're heading for the cafe/bar. It turns out the owners are friends of Hannibal's.

'Yeah. It feels pretty great. I'm quite surprised. I didn't think it would be so easy. Pleasant. Or funny. He's a funny guy. I liked him a lot too, I'm glad you did. You were both quite entertaining together you know?'

'Indeed.'

Will smiles. Just outside one of the shops in town Hannibal pauses. Inside he can see a friend he'd tried to call on earlier. He tells Will to go on ahead whilst he arranges to see the friend maybe the following day. Will smiles.

In the cafe he sits at the same table he's occupied maybe five times now. The person at the till says 'hey. Just you? Not your dad today?'

'No he's gone back. Different friend this evening.'

'Not the ?'

'No' smiles Will 'I'll wait to order, so we can argue about who gets the whole or part of a dish. Is that ok?'

At that moment Em enters the cafe and once again sits down opposite Will. This time Will is both surprised and a little bit irritated.

'Busy day today you know, busy. Want to come and hang out? Go some place?'

'Kind of you but I'm waiting for a friend'

'Yeah. It was your dad last time. And the others, what's with you? My company not good enough' Em reaches out a hand to grab Will's wrist.

Will pulls back but his arm is held tight. 'I'm sorry. I think you've got entirely the wrong idea about me. Could you let go of my arm please'

'Yeah. Alright. Sorry. I just think you're being a bit of a a tease. Look you're on your own. You've got nowhere to be why not come with me? You'd have a good time. Really. I'm a lot of fun'

Will is trying to work out what on earth to say.

Hannibal pushes his way into the cafe and sees someone sitting opposite Will. For just a flash he has a hit of such intense jealousy he thinks Will is bound to see it. The person opposite Will, is maybe late twenties. Well built with a gym tone. A certain kind of smooth handsomeness which usually dissipates with age or lifestyle. He's got tattoos disappearing under one sleeve. Hannibal sees him reach forward and grab Will's wrist. The wave hits Hannibal again. What is this?

Will is frowning hard, gets his arm back and just then looks up and sees Hannibal. The look on his face is one of such profound relief and pleasure and just maybe love that Hannibal is now awash with a whole different set or emotions. Whatever is going on here he is about to rescue Will from it.

As he gets closer to the table the man leans forward and hisses at Will who is sitting as far back in the booth as he can get. Will stands and holds out his hand to Hannibal who takes it and allows himself to be reeled in. Will takes his face in has hands and kisses him quite hard. Hannibal, anticipating this, kisses back. It's as convincing a kiss as anyone might need. The younger man looks at them both.

'Alright. Alright I get the hint. Why didn't you just say, you didn't need to play along'

Will says nothing. A denial would add fuel to a fire that doesn't need it. The man twitches, disappointed that Will knows when to shut up. He slides out of the booth and gives Hannibal a rude up and down stare. He looks back at Will. 'Another time then. If you get lonely'

Will is holding onto Hannibal's hand quite tightly until Em has left the bar. When the door has closed he pretty well falls back into the seat.

The owner comes over 'Hannibal, hello, sorry, good to see you. I hope you're both alright. Will, isn't it? If he comes back we'll kick him out ok. That's got to be the third time he's had a go'

'Will?' Hannibal enquiries.

'It's too odd. It started last week. He just said some slightly over the top things. I thought he was just messing around. You know, bored. Then when dad and I were here he came over. Actually I was on my own at the beginning. Dad was in the bathrooms. And now tonight. Dad thought a car was hanging around at the house too, and someone came and tried the windows or was looking through them. I honestly don't get it.'

Will is sounding anxious and stressed. Hannibal thinks about the gaslighting by his students. He can imagine this is exactly the kind of thing that could make Will extremely anxious. Adrenaline finding its way along pathways already smoothed by previous traumatic incidents. He's shaking just very slightly. Hannibal rests a hand on his arm 'it's alright. He's gone. It's alright. You're safe'
Will shudders and lets Hannibal get an arm round him.

The owner goes back to the bar and brings two glasses of wine over. He sits himself down opposite the other two. Hands over the glasses. 'Will. Don't think about him. Think about the delicious meal you are going to eat or that Hannibal will eat instead of you if you neglect your plate for thirty seconds.' Will laughs. It's not as light as it might be but it is real.

'Thank you. Sorry. Stupid of me to overreact.' Hannibal pulls him closer and turns and kisses his temple. 'It's not an overreaction by the sound of it. He has gone though. And he can be in no doubt that his interest, what ever it is, is not returned. It was a good kiss.'

'Yeah. Sorry about that. Seemed like a good idea'

'it was. Perfect. Excellent thinking.'

The owner looks mildly surprised. 'You mean? I thought.. ok now I'm embarrassed. Sorry. You had me convinced.'

Hannibal beams at his friend 'good. If it convinced you we can hope it convinced him. Tonio this is my friend Will Graham, he's using Chiyoh's cabin. You might have met his father yesterday, and some other friends of ours over the weekend?'

'They came in Sunday lunchtime and ate a lot and tipped enormously. I liked them a lot.'

Both Will and Hannibal laugh, also a lot. Tonio knows good medicine.

.....

When they walk back later in the evening Will says. 'I'm sorry. I know I'm going to be a bit clingy for the next day or so. It's slightly tripped me. Say if it gets too much please.'

Hannibal takes his arm and doesn't say anything. They walk back to the cabin like that, Will feeling anchored. Hannibal wanting to be a port in the storm.

When they get closer to the cabin they can see a small sporty jeep parked up on the kerb. It's almost blocking the Bentley in. Will lets go of Hannibal's arm as Freddie Lounds gets out of the driver's seat.

'Well, I didn't expect you two! I saw the car and thought it just couldn't be possible. But it is. What on earth are you doing here?'

Will and Hannibal exchange looks 'I think I'd ask the same thing. What are you doing here Ms Lounds?'

'Me, oh I got a Tip. Nasty tip too. Want to see?' She holds up her phone and the skips between images. 'Friend of mine did the triangulation. She's near here. Oh don't look so horrified I called your boss. I bet all your pals will be here tomorrow. But what I want to know is how come you're around when a girl gets it on a stag of all things! Both of you here this time. Just one of you last week. Unless there's more I don't know. Where were you last week Mr Graham hmm?'

'Ms Lounds. Do you have your accommodation for this evening?' 'Not exactly, why?' 'I can suggest a good bed and breakfast here, I know the owner, it's a little late but would you like me to call? They're more likely to accommodate you if the request is from a friend. I only ask you not to do anything too awful to their decor.'

'Ok. What's the catch?'

'There isn't one. Simply that if there is a killer out here, I wouldn't want to think of you having nowhere to sleep or having to resort to your car.'

'Oh. Ok. Yeah. Err. Thank you that's kind of you. Sure. Really no catch'

Hannibal looks at her straight 'none what so ever'

'Thank you then. That would be helpful'

Hannibal gets out his cell and walks a few feet away from them as he makes the call. He takes a minute or two and there is some laughter on his part. Five minutes later he comes back and says 'we could walk from here or you may want to take the jeep. Which would you prefer?'

.....

In the cabin when both Will and Hannibal have returned from the bed and breakfast having deposited a very bemused Freddie Lounds, 'really, no catch, there must be, are they cannibals, they've got vampire cats, they're out of a Stephen King novel. No? Then what?'

Will turns to Hannibal, 'you know it's going to kill her thinking there's an angle and she can't work it out?'

Hannibal smiles very happily at Will as he puts the kettle on to boil 'yes. Awful isn't it?'

'Oh you total horror!'

It's lovely down in the woods today

Chapter Summary

> The aftermath of Cassie's murder - Freddie Lounds, Team Sassy Science, the stalker, stirrings of Hannigram, Hannibal tries to understand, Will tries to explain. Progress, of a kind. Did I mention the stalker?

'Whose body is it do you think? Is there a connection to the girl last week?'

'A copycat perhaps? Or some connection. After all we're not that far as the crow flies from Minnesota.'

'I suppose not. I hadn't really thought of that. Freddie will though. Do you really thinks she likes one of us for it? Seems a bit unlikely. Even though you were there, and I was on my own' as he says it he slows down. They look at each other. 'Shit, I hope she doesn't take that tack, I could definitely do without that'

'we both could, you were here and I was on my own for this one'

'or we were together. With my dad? Murder family? Oh that's just peachy.'

As they're talking Hannibal's cell rings. It's too late for a polite caller, he looks at the number 'it's Jack!.. Agent Crawford, how are you?'

'Dr Lecter. Evening. I'm very sorry to disturb you but I need to know if you know where Will is. Beverly Katz won't tell me, she was very difficult about it.'

'Ah, Ms Katz is a loyal friend. Will is still signed off for a few more days'

'Not any more, he's been mandatorily called in, over my head this time. A second girl has been killed, using a stag's head motif. Somewhere further north. Near Rhode Island. I need to track Will down, get him up there. The science team are already on their way. Can you get a message to him?'

'I can try Jack. What do you want me to tell him?' He writes down a few notes on a pad Will pushes towards him together with a pencil. It's an address and some other coordinates and some timings.

They hang up. Hannibal looks at Will. 'The good news is we will have the company of the science team. The bad news is this includes Jack and the rest of the local FBI field office and a crime scene that you have been called in to'

'Oh. Shit. That is just. But look. I've had a week off, you've had less than 24 hours! Do you want to get out of here, so you don't get further entangled in this?'

'Certainly not Will. I won't abandon you like that.'

'What about Jack?'

'I think when it comes to it I will tell him the truth' They both drink their drinks. Both of them thinking, perhaps not surprisingly of the kiss in the cafe. Will wonders if it counts as a first kiss, as really it was a stalker deterrent. Hannibal is wondering just how much trouble Freddie Lounds could make for them. He is pretty confident that he could argue that Will is no longer his patient. That some of their relationship is therapeutic doesn't mean it is therapy. And yes, thank you, he knows this is the proverbial thin ice. He wonders if she will feel obliged to tell either Jack alone or Jack and all her readership about whatever she thinks is between them. He wonders too if he will be able to sleep knowing Will is just across the room.

Will looks at him over the rim of his cup. He's about to say something when his cell goes

you won't believe this. Actually you might. Dead girl just next door to where you are. We're on our way. Zeller is driving cos I thought I was having a nice night off with beer, a bath and something edible beginning with 'b' I dunno brioche? Bacon? Burgers? Anyway we'll be there in about four hours time. Ffs. Please can we beg coffee off you. Maybe at about 6am cos it will be still too dark to fucking collect anything then and the PD have the scene tied down apparently. God knows what that means. I'm pissed. Not in the right way. See you later. Love you. Is Hannibal there? Love to him too. I've had beer, tell him it's beer love. Bev

Will holds the phone up so Hannibal can read it he smiles. 'We could ask them to stay here. It might be more,' he searches for a word 'settling?'

'That's nice of you. Sure you don't mind. Everyone will get a bit ratty if it's bad.'

'I'd rather be here with you ratty than not here. If it's thoroughly miserable we can review arrangements after 48 hours. That seems par for the course for most scenes. What do you think? We can always come here again when there aren't dead bodies. Maybe in the spring. For the blossom?'

He stops. Aware that he has just proposed something a long way in the future that holds the implication that they will still want to do things together then, maybe be together at that future point.

'Sounds nice. Lets do that.' Will is looking down at his phone texting Bev back. Hannibal thinks it just possible he didn't quite take in the second part of what he'd said. He's not sure whether to be pleased or sorry. Will looks up at him. Ah, he did hear. He smiles. Looks back down at his phone and then holds it up for Hannibal to see

*tell Hannibal I love him. Not just the beer talking. I promise. Sorry we're crashing your sleepover. We won't make it more fun, but we'll bring personality and angst, and beer. You

can choose which you'd most like. Maybe. Damn, Jimmy says this is a no open beverage state. Is that true or is he just saying that? See you very soon*

'Hannibal. Just to be serious for a moment. I said the guy in the cafe left me feeling clingy. That's still true. It might get worse. It depends on how bad it is. I'm letting you know so you're prepared. I can feel my stress just creeping up a tiny bit. It's not too bad right now. But it's better to prepare you. Oh. And I sleep walked the night before last' he holds a hand up 'dad stopped me. He tied me to the futon. I was a bit embarrassed then I remembered he did it when I was a child. So it was kind of comforting too'

'Will. Do you know what will help? Tonight? Tomorrow?'

Will would quite like to say something like 'extended sex where you fuck me into the futon would be nice thanks, or maybe against the loft ladder which is quite like the one in you office which frankly I have inappropriate dreams about, so much so I can't sit opposite it any more.' Instead he says 'holding my hand helped earlier. Thank you. So did what you said. Just that you were talking to me but not needing an answer. Kissing you was nice but probably not appropriate at a murder scene'

'Only nice Will? I shall have to practice' he means to make it light but it doesn't quite come out like that. They both look at each other and then Hannibal takes two long steps round the counter and is kissing Will like he means to definitely be sure Will thinks it's better than nice. He does. He reciprocates. They are still kissing ten minutes later. Will thinks its spectacularly nice.

When they pull apart Will manages to say 'that definitely helps. Wow. Yeah. How did I not know? Still, maybe not at the actual crime scene?'

'Will!'

'Really. I feel enormously better. Is that the endorphins? Or serotonin or something?'

Hannibal pulls him closer again 'I think they are making you talk when you had much better not' he kisses him again. It lasts for longer this time.

'Wow. I'm breathless. You kiss amazingly. Wow. What else do you do amazingly? Ok. That came out a bit wrong?'

'Will. You're still over-talking. Ahh. It's a symptom isn't it? When you get over stressed?'

Will nods. Keeping his mouth shut. Hannibal is the first person to work out that when he is overstretched even a little he gets disinhibited and says not quite everything he's thinking but a lot of it. It's got him into bad trouble before. And pissed off more than a few partners. And bosses. Worse than when he shuts down.

'Is kissing making it worse or better?' Will smiles slightly desperately 'so, it's helping with one part of the stress but possibly exacerbating another bit?' Will is nodding 'but it's improving because you've been able to explain without anyone losing their temper or doors being slammed? Dear Will. It may take time but I promise to learn everything I can to get it

right.' Will slumps gratefully against him and then leans up to kiss Hannibal again. It's softer and sweeter and lasts even longer. At the end they are both just moulded to the other, breathing in time.

Hannibal pulls Will towards his futon where his night clothes are. 'Will, get ready for bed and then we will try and find a way for you to sleep and not increase your stress response. I'll do the same'

Ten minutes later Hannibal brings his own futon into Will's room and lays it down a small distance away from Will's. He goes back for his bedding and comes back to find Will has pulled it a bit closer. 'Like that?' Will nods and wriggles down under his quilt and then pulls the cord from his robe out of the loops, he ties one end to his wrist and the other end he offers to Hannibal. He ties it to his wrist. 'Alright?' Will nods again and then gestures to the light before he switches it off.

In the dark Will's hand finds his own and holds it carefully. He's asleep within minutes. Hannibal looks at him until he too falls asleep. The alarm is set for six am. In five and a half hour's time. He tries not to feel exhausted at the thought.

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When Hannibal wakes, Will is still asleep exactly as he was when they first went to bed. He carefully undoes the tie of the robe from his wrist, goes to the communal bathroom, puts on a robe and goes to start coffee. It's five to six. As the coffee percolates he thinks about the sleeping arrangements. He'll leave them as they are, if it becomes necessary to explain he will, otherwise he'll simply let it pass uncommented on. Though he might say something to Beverly Katz. He takes coffee through to Will who is just stirring,

'I slept. All the way through. Thank you. Did you?'

'Yes. Thank you. I've brought coffee. I think the science team will be here soon. I'm going to suggest we don't worry about the unconventional sleeping arrangements, if they want to ask I am content for them to know. How do you feel about that?'

'Not too fussed. I trust all three of them. Though I know Brian has done something stupid he doesn't want any of us to know about.'

'Do you know what?'

'No. I just know he's feeling very guilty about it. You can see it leaking all over his interactions with all of us. Have a look today.'

Hannibal knows he won't see what Will sees but he's interested to find out if he can spot some of the tells now he knows there is something to look for. He nods agreement at Will.

'Will you get up? Jack wanted you on scene by' he glances at the notepad from the previous evening 'eight am, so you all have about two hours. If they're here soon.'

'Are you going to come too?'

'I think not. Jack doesn't know I'm here. I'm willing for him to know if it becomes necessary to tell him. Though Freddie Lounds may well get the information in first.' He pauses 'so it may be prudent to tell him.' You don't have to be empathic to read the look on Hannibal's face as resigned frustration 'I will text him. It's probably the easiest thing to do'

'Ok. That seems like a good idea. Don't come. Why don't I keep you updated with how it's going? So you know how the day is panning out? Having seen the photographs last night I don't feel as bad as I often do. I don't have the sense of dread. I wonder if I'll be less effective?'

'We shall find out. How are you now?'

Will stretches out his hand to catch hold of Hannibal's sleeve. He doesn't do anything with it just holds it, the way a child might hold a comforter.

'I'm not bad. No dread. And I slept well. You really helped. Thank you. I feel ok. Which is strange in itself. It might be the eye of the storm though. I'm not going to overthink it. Oh and the kisses were good. Though I think we both are out of practice.'

Hannibal narrows his eyes at Will 'how wretched of you'

'Yeah. Good innit?'

The doorbell goes and Hannibal rises still narrowing his eyes at Will,

'I know, I anticipate a reckoning at some point Dr Lecter!' Will smirks and takes a big gulp of coffee 'see the coffee is good, so you clearly have practiced that'

Hannibal decides to say nothing, just stores various bits of information in his head for a future point. In particular the ways in which Will being humorous is indicative of a good state of mind. It's one of the ways in which Beverly Katz is good for him, as her personality lends itself to this kind of interaction.

He thinks back to the conversation he had with Jack over dinner, when he thought about public humour and private passions. He has caught a few glimpses of that in his own interactions with Will. It's not his usual modus operandi. He knows people find him overly stiff and formal but somehow Will makes him want to laugh, live a little lighter. It's a tantalising change. He wonders what will happen.

At the door, the three science team members look fit to drop, or fight, or argue. Beverly is hung over, Zeller and Jimmy tired from the drive and several too long days. Even though they only left on Sunday it's been full on for the last three days and here they are, only Thursday.

Jack it transpires doesn't know they were here last weekend. As they drink coffee and eat croissant in the kitchen Jimmy explains that they decided not to say anything 'we thought Will shouldn't have Jack stomping over his down time, or ours. Or yours come to that. He knows we had a weekend somewhere, we didn't say it was here. We're all here now. He should be content with that.'

'As is Ms Lounds.' Everyone looks shocked 'we encountered her last night. You should expect her on the scene today. She may have found out you were here recently. Or she may find out. She might well tell Jack. I have decided to tell him I am here. It seems prudent to get the information in first.'

Zeller looks a little pale 'I'll tell Jack. He won't shout at me very much. Probably. I'll talk to Lounds too.' Hannibal is not surprised that Will is right, it's clear Zeller is carrying something around with him. But Beverly and Jimmy seem oblivious. Hannibal wonders what it is.

When Will joins them the team perks up and josh him, ask about his dad, ask about how he's doing. No one says anything about Hannibal having spent the last day or two here with Will but it might be in their minds. Beverly in particular is deliberately saying nothing in a rather obvious way. She winks at Hannibal as the four of them get ready to leave him at the cabin. Off to see Jack and the scene.

.....

Will texts Hannibal a little after lunch time. Hannibal has spent some of the morning preparing three bedrooms for the science team. He's also been shopping and had lunch with Tonio and his wife Julia at the cafe-bar, he's still there when it arrives.

'Excuse me, I think this is Will

ok. So. Good plan to tell Jack cos Freddie was all over us this morning. Zeller got her to back off a bit. Some kind of promise. I'm not asking. It'll just be annoying. Bev and Jimmy are ok. I am too. If you can bear it I'd like to talk about it later on, would that be alright? I know you're on a break, in theory. I hope your day involves fewer corpses. Or antlers. Is that just a hipster thing? See you later.

He reads the text twice. Will does seem to be ok. It'll be clearer later on how it's effected him.

Tonio smiles at him 'Hannibal I've not seen you bring anyone here before, what's with Will?'

'He's a friend. We met through his work for the FBI, initially he was my patient. To cover him in the field. It has unfolded from there. He's very good company.'

Julia arches an eye brow at him so he resigns himself for some gentle teasing 'Tonio said he kissed you yesterday, to put the stalker off, he said he was convinced!'

'Yes. Good. I believe that was the idea. He kisses very well.'

Julia smiles at him 'but you knew that?'

Hannibal smiles back at her 'I had no idea, I hadn't kissed him before'

'Oh. Oh. I'm sorry, when Tonio said that it was a 'set up' I thought he was joking. So. Oh. Alright. So a friend then. That's excellent. He seems very nice. What about the other young man. Do you know what was going on there?'

'I think Will was as bemused as any of us. I'm sure he's been 'hit on' before, but this seemed to be an odd combination of aggression and petulance. I don't have any explanation for it really. He hasn't been back in?'

'Not yet. Though we've had the journalist woman in this morning. She said you found her accommodation, with the Royals, is that right?'

'Keep your friends close and your enemies closer?'

'Oh. I see. Oh yes. A good idea. So do they all work for the FBI? Ms Lounds showed us a photo of Will's, and your friends at the scene, she wanted to know about them too.'

'They do. They are members of a forensic science team. They're good company too. If they come in over the next few days they may not be at their best. I hope you'll forgive them. Will too. His role in the team is somewhat stressful.'

'That plus a stalker. That's no fun. Are you alright Hannibal?'

'Yes. Though thank you for asking.'

'Still waters run deep. I know that. And I have known you for half our lives'

'The better half I'm glad to say.'

.....

Outside the bar Freddie Lounds is leaning against the trunk of her car

'So Dr Lecter. Thanks for the accommodation arrangements. That's working out well. So how come you're here. Really. Just a bit of background?'

'I have friends here. I've been coming here for years.'

'Do you think there's a connection between that fact and the sudden murder of a girl, who by the way no one local seems to know?'

'Ms Lounds. I don't know. From my side. There is no connection. But you know that I've recently been involved in cases for the FBI, you've reported some of them. So there maybe from someone else's point of view.'

'Oh. So the murder didn't happen because you're here. You're here, and it happened here because of It?'

'Possibly. That is not the only possibility.'

'Or because of Graham. I heard he's got a stalker'

Hannibal keeps very still, keen not to set off any of Freddie's antennae. 'Possibly because Dr Graham is here.'

'Or the rest of the team, who were also here. Are you becoming killer magnets?'

'I'd like to say not. But it's impossible to know at this stage. It feels like...' he stops he might not want to say any more

'What? Like a game. A long game? Because that's what it looks like to me. Started as one thing and now it's changed? Don't forget I met Abigail Hobbs. This has her prints all over it, oh not literally. Just in general. Kind of sly. But also immature, petulant. Messy. She got away didn't she. In Minnesota. I wonder if she's regretting that. Didn't play out how she meant?'

'I'm sure you are as astute as ever Ms Lounds'

'Really? Is that a compliment?'

'If you like.'

Freddie frowns as she goes back to the driver's side and hesitates before getting in,

'Thanks. I think'

Hannibal smiles, Ms Lounds can still at least be a source of mild entertainment. And her website too.

.....

At six, Will and Jimmy are sitting on the two driver side seats with the doors open and their feet on the ground.

'Do you think we're nearly done for the day? I'm starving. Dr L said he'd cook.' Jimmy yawns.

'I really hope so. I don't think there's anything else we can tell Jack or do right now. Do you?'

'Here come Bev and Brian. Alright what's happening?'

'Jack says we can go. We're done for the day. Which is fortunate as I still want to kill him. Can I? I know how to get rid of the body clean. Please?'

'We could get someone worse. And, well, you know.'

'Where are we going to eat? Back at that nice cafe place?'

'Han.. Dr Lecter said he'd cook.'

'Really? His food is legendary. Great. That's made this day a whole lot better. Will, Jack says he's fixed us somewhere to stay so we'll get out of your hair later'

'It's fine. Stay with us. It'll be better won't it. Hannibal said he'd make up rooms during the day. So they should be ready when we get back. You can have a nap and then eat.'

Bev lays her head on Will's shoulder 'thanks dad, it's been a hard day' Will pokes her and then slings an arm round her. 'Come on then. Mom said not to be late' he pauses 'ok. I didn't just say that out loud and don't for god's sake anyone tell him I did' They all laugh at the slight faux pas. Jimmy winks at him.

Back at the cabin Hannibal fills them each a glass of wine. He indicates the rooms he's allocated them. No one asks about his and Will's sleeping arrangements. Jimmy goes to lie down for an hour Zeller plugs himself into an iPod and brings the low rocking chair into the living room sits and closes his eyes. Beverly joins Will and Hannibal in the kitchen. Will is chopping vegetables as directed. Bev sits on a counter stool and rests her elbows on the surface.

No one speaks for the first few minutes. It's just an extended period of companionship and smooth mutual acceptance. The rhythmic chopping of hard vegetables, the hiss of the stove and oil heating, the sound of water from the taps. A counterpoint to the noises of the day.

'If was Cassie Boyle. One of Abigail's friends. Also looks like a Shrike victim. Must have been two of them to get her on the stag's head. Maybe not her brother. Hard to say. No useful forensics that we found.' Beverly's tone is flat.

Will looks at her 'on the whole I'd say not her brother, someone else though. The cousin? What do we know about her, or him. Do we know if it's a girl?'

'He or she is called Em apparently, Alana told me. She's out of hospital now. Signed off for another week. Her doctor told Jack to fuck off apparently. On the phone, not face to face. Still like to have seen that.' She smiles a tired smile.

A little more animation entering her voice. 'Maybe we could all practice. Build it up like? Here let's see "fuck off Jack" hmm I'm not very convincing. Some things you have to practice. Why are you smiling? Is this some private joke? Typical. I'm out for a day or two and you've got private jokes. Huh.'

'Just agreeing Bev' will glances at Hannibal who concentrates on the chicken he is dicing 'practice is a good thing, takes 10,000 hours to get expert' Hannibal snorts involuntarily and turns his back to them working at the stove top. Bev narrows her eyes at Will, and he smiles back.

'Alright. Don't tell me. I'm grateful though. That you've let us stay. Will you thank your friend? I can do motels but this nicer. Much nicer. I'm just a little .' She waves a hand around 'over emotional right now. I hate this case. I don't know why it's getting to me so much'

'Don't they all in one way or another?'

'Yeah. That's probably true. How are you doing Will?'

'Ok. Not too bad. Freddie Lounds showed me pictures of the scene on her phone last night it sort of prepared me. It was harder to get a read today, but I also felt less shit. So' he holds his hand horizontally and tilts it from one side to the other, the universal sign for so so. 'I'm not telling Jack though. He'll be furious if anything gets in the way of, well, you know.'

They're all quiet again. They all know.

.....

After dinner, which manages to be delicious, and prompt some happy conversation about holiday food and bad motel food, the five of them head back to the bar. Julia is delighted to meet them and there is friendly banter and laughter between them all.

When they're finally getting ready to leave Tonio pulls Hannibal to one side 'the guy came back, about an hour before you came in. He wanted to know if we'd seen Will today. We asked him to leave and not come back. I thought you should know.' Hannibal looks at his friend 'I don't like this at all. We'll be careful.' He decides to say nothing to Will just makes sure he keeps him within arm's reach. He fingers the edge of the kitchen knife in his pocket he picked up in the cabin earlier.

But safer to stay at home

Chapter Summary

The final denouement of Abigail's new plan. Zeller's secret is closer to being exposed. Jack is mightily pissed off. And really they'd like to go home.

Also, the identity of Abigail's cousin finally gets cleared up. Well there's a thing.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

In the trailer Em and Abigail are eating some take out. Nick still hasn't come back. They've sort of been waiting for him and waiting to see what happens at the scene. Em tells Abigail about what he's seen throughout the day.

'Ok. So all of them except the older guy went to Cassie today. They've cleared up there apparently. I got talking to Freddie Lounds. I dropped the hint about Graham getting stalked. She ate it right up. Also I sort of suggested maybe he was more involved. Oh and him and the doctor too. She looked, what was the word she used? "Scandalous" I laughed with her, had to apologise for having no photos. She said she'd pay if I got some! Wouldn't use a story without though. No worth the fall out. He's some big cheese in Baltimore. Better to have him on side I guess.'

'Yeah. Probably. Look if Nick turns up I think the thing to do is somehow get him either to the scene if they're all there again or to the cabin either at breakfast time or at night. Actually maybe breakfast time would be better they'll be less on the ball. You'll have to stay out of it Graham knows you now. The doctor too.'

'Ok. But if we can split them up, the doc and Graham that could work well. You get the doc on side, he was on his own today. And I'll go for Graham?'

'If Nick shows up'

'He will. I'll text him. It'll be fine, I've a plan'

'Ok Em. What you say then'

Late that night Em texts Nicholas Boyle

nick mate, what the fuck happened. Why did you do Cassie? I know she was annoying the other day but shit man. I'm sorry. It's not looking good. The Feds are here. They're all over it. Made the link to Marissa you know. What will you do

what are you talking about Em? I didn't do anything!! What about Cassie? Fuck. What the fuck is going on?

oh my god. You don't know? What's happening then? Someone killed her. Shit I'm so sorry. I thought it was you. Look, why don't you come back. We can talk about it. I'm sorry, I had to tell you. Crap. Bad to find out this way. Come back.

yeah alright. I'm a few hours away. I'll come back in a bit. Just chatting to a girl I met here

.....

Late that evening Bev is helping Hannibal wash up in the kitchen, the other three men are in the living room drinking a range of alcoholic things.

'I think he's almost ok. What do you think?'

'He was sleep walking when his father was here, before I arrived'

'Oh bugger. Not quite ok then? How was he last night?'

'The stalker thing is bothering him. Do you know about the student gas lighting him a few years ago?'

'Yeah. I've heard him give the talk. He's got some amazing slides, he took photos of various things whilst it was going on and made an occasional video diary of what he thought was happening. It's incredibly effective. People really pay attention to it. You learn a lot about how people can screw with your head with even minimum input. It makes people think very hard about the kind of violent and more twisted people we encounter. And how easy it is for someone with a bit of charm to wind you up and watch you go. Eerie. But it's a good talk because you see Will come out the other side and explain how they were caught.'

'Is he worse or better now than he was then?'

'Alana says the experience actually helped him find much better ways of describing what was going on, helped him articulate his inner workings, didn't make him more stable, but better able to explain it. I don't think he's unstable actually. I think he's got a condition that makes him a bit wonky. That's all. I don't actually think he's ill. It annoys me a bit that people treat him like he's sick or something.'

'That's an astute observation. He can of course be additionally unwell as well as neurologically unusual. Just as anyone disabled can also be sick or well. Of have a latent condition which renders them liable to certain symptoms. Any of us might be like that. I may have a horrible cold but I wear glasses. Tomorrow I may be physically better but I will still need the glasses.'

'Do you have glasses? I haven't seen you wear them?'

'As it happens, yes, for reading. Though that wasn't the point I was making.'

'Oh, I know that I just wondered about the glasses. Do they make you look smarter?'

.....

Late that evening Will is almost asleep when Hannibal comes into the bedroom. He picks up the tie and attaches it to his wrist and lies down. Will leans over him and kisses him on the cheek and then switches off the light, he quietly murmurs '10,000 hours. Don't forget.'

.....

Everyone is woken in the morning by some banging on the front door. Brian, who has already been up for a run is there first, when he opens it Abigail bursts in

'Oh my god, he's completely lost it. I didn't know what to do. He totally terrified me'.

In her hand she's holding a knife which she looks at now and drops. It has blood on the end. She starts to shake and cry. By then everyone is up and there. Beverly gets a towel and blanket and pulls Abigail away from the knife and sits her down and wraps the blanket round her. Jimmy uses gloves to pick the knife up and puts it into an evidence bag from one of the boxes they'd brought in from the car the night before.

Brian carefully opens the front door. Lying in the driveway between them and the Bentley is a young man writhing on the ground. 'Quick, someone bring the first aid kit. It's in the green box.'

Hannibal is there fast and between them he and Brian slow the bleeding and get the man into as good a state as they can before an ambulance arrives. Jimmy has already phoned. They hold onto the wound and the man's hand. He's lost a fair amount of blood. But no one really deserves to go alone into that good night, if that's where he's heading. When the ambulance arrives he's loaded in and Hannibal goes with him to the hospital. He gives Will the keys to the Bentley 'just in case'.

Will looks at Abigail. He'd like to believe that somehow she's the victim in this, if not in the other things. He's willing at least to hear her version of events. He glances down at the tatami where she dropped the knife. It's spotted with blood. He wonders how hard it will be to get it out.

Beverly makes her tea with sugar and they wait for the local police and for Jack. This became an inevitability the moment she fell through the door. She'll definitely be taken into custody if nothing else. And what happens to the young man now en route to the local ER may also be significant.

There's another knock on the door. Jimmy assumes it will be Jack. But it's Freddie Lounds. She's inside before he can stop her and has snapped three pictures double quick. Of Abigail with a blanket round her and Beverly holding her tea, of Will standing next to her looking down with concern, of an evidence bag with a knife in it. Before anyone can say anything she's gone again after having thrust her card into Abigail's hand. 'In case you lost the last one'.

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Freddie saw it all go down. She even got some of it on camera phone. She had a text early in the morning telling her to meet the FBI team at some stupidly early hour outside the house where Hannibal's Bentley is parked. When she arrives she and Zeller have a brief conversation, she is transcribing her notes in the Jeep when Nick Boyle drives up, gets out of his car and walks towards Abigail coming up the road. She didn't quite see it all but it seems to escalate fast and Nick pushes Abigail hard, she seems to get away and then has blood on her, and then there is a struggle, then she is running and Nick is on the ground.

Freddie plays it back. It's not perfect but with a bit of an edit it'll be great. With the photos in the cabin too this could be brilliant. She jumps back in the jeep and heads for the hospital. There she finds Nick has been decanted into surgery, but she finds the paramedics who brought him, gets a picture of the inside of the ambulance and gets shouted at in one of the corridors as she gets one of Nick being prepped.

She bumps into Hannibal who is explaining what happened to a police officer who has arrived. And seems utterly bamboozled by the events that have overtaken his town the last few days. She doesn't approach. She'll get his name later. And buy him a drink. She waits.

'So, Dr Lecter. Did you manage to save him then?'

'Ms Lounds. I was merely along for the journey. He's in good hands.'

'Do you know why he was there? Why were any of you here? Is there some weird conspiracy going on? Lots of local people are very concerned that you or your friend have brought something nasty to town or attracted it'

'That's an excellent question Ms Lounds. I hope you find the answer. Certainly I expect you shall.'

'Oh. Err. Thanks' she's non-plussed once again. How does he do that?

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Hannibal texts Will to say he can be collected as it's all gone faster than expected and Boyle is now in post op. Successful surgery apparently. Will texts backs to say he's on his way, Jack has arrived and nabbed Abigail though he's not left the cabin yet. So Will is glad for a good reason to leave. The scrutiny is just a little much. He carefully slid the door to his and Hannibal's room closed with his foot when Jack and Abigail were in a staring match. He catches Beverly's eye as he moves away a step or two and she keeps her face blank.

The hospital is well signposted, probably because of the tourists who come in the summer and the fishing crew who are here autumn through to spring. When Will gets there he parks and locks the Bentley. Hannibal is waiting just inside the hospital A&E entrance. He sees Will get out of the car and head towards him.

From off to one side he sees the man from the bar, the stalker, head towards Will across the car park. Not running, because he'd attract attention. But purposeful. Hannibal instantly speeds up pointing to where the man is running now towards Will. Will looks around and

sees the guy and takes a moment to run in the opposite direction. Hannibal changes course to intersect the stalker's path. It's touch and go who will get to Will first.

It's Hannibal, just, who tackles the younger man to the ground. He and Will both sit on him. He lunges and bucks trying to get them off, no match for two older, and in combination, heavier men. Will gets out his cell, and shaking his head calls the local sheriff's office.

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Much later, Abigail is gone, with Jack. Nick is in intensive care in the hospital sedated but recovering, handcuffed to the bed, with a police guard, just in case. The stalker is identified as Matthew Brown or 'Em' as he's known in the family, Abigail's cousin on her mother's side, hence the different surnames. What he is doing isn't yet clear. His version is that he was trying to make friends with Will to help his cousin out. Tell her side of the story.

It still doesn't feel right. And fortunately there is independent evidence from the cafe-bar staff who'd witnessed his three interactions with Will. But there's not much to charge him with so he's being released. And of course Freddie is there waiting for him. She also got the whole football tackle on camera.

The montage she comes up with for the front page is pretty damn good. Very comprehensive. She's got all the angles covered including the fact the team was here for the weekend, and that Will has been here for more than a week, and that Hannibal was staying with him, and his father. And so on. She doesn't make any claims. Just asks some questions that leave a nasty taste in the mouth.

So now Jack is asking some difficult questions. He is the head of the BAU for a reason. He's not a total idiot. Both Hannibal and Will know they will be in for something of a grilling when everyone is finally back. And the dust settles.

Really nothing is resolved. Did Nick Boyle kill his sister as Abigail and Em claim. Or was it Abigail, with or without help. Actually she must have had help. It couldn't have been done by one person. They can't ask Nick, but they can't hold Em. There's evidence he was here when Marissa Schurr died so he is clear of that.

Abigail claims Nick Boyle kidnapped her, and that he killed Marissa. There is some physical evidence to support that. And now Abigail hasn't denied being with him that makes it harder to prove whether she was involved or not. It's a mess. Two girls are dead. And it's impossible to be sure yet who was involved. Even when Nick wakes up it may not be possible to be sure who did what to whom.

So she has been taken back to Port Haven. Still an uncharged victim, though there's a discussion about 'actual bodily harm' in relation to Nick's stabbing. Em has been released uncharged, for now, and after being interviewed by Freddie Lounds has gone off somewhere. Nick is sedated, charged with definitely one murder and maybe another.

The science team have been told to come back the following day. So they're sitting again in the cafe/bar where they've eaten as much as they can fit in their faces. They're all a bit subdued. In contrast to the last two visits. Tonio is kind and Julia tops up glasses regularly.

Will is clearly anxious, and as he predicted, slightly clingy. After all Matthew Brown as they now know him to be could be anywhere. And probably is.

When they arrive back at the cabin there's a note under the door.

Will - look, I'm sorry. I messed it up right. I'm not very good at this sort of thing, and I got it wrong. Sorry if I upset you. I didn't mean any harm. I really was just trying to be friendly. Obviously went about it the wrong way right. But no hard feelings I hope. Tell your dad and your boyfriend sorry. I didn't mean to worry them either.

Thanks for looking after Abigail. She's the one I'm most concerned about. The reporter told me Uncle Jacob wrote to the FBI telling them she was the one who did it. I liked my uncle yeah? But I don't know why he'd say that. It seems really off. Right? His own daughter. Maybe he thought he'd get caught and not killed and he saw a way out of the charges. I don't know how these things work.

So, anyway. I'm going to be living closer to Abs, to make sure she's ok. So if we bump into each other it's because of that. I'm really not trying to stalk you. Or anything like that. The journalist said that's what you said. Sorry if that's what's you thought.
Yeah. So no hard feelings and best wishes,
Em Brown
(Matthew)

Will reads it and then hands it to Hannibal who reads it to the rest of the team.

'I don't like it' says Jimmy 'but he's played the hand very well'

They all look at him and then reluctantly nod agreement. He has indeed played his hand exceptionally well. There's nothing here especially menacing. But it lets you know he knows everything. Everything.

Jimmy carries on 'What I don't know is how Freddie knew about the letter. From Hobbs.'

Ah, thinks Hannibal, so that's what Dr Zeller is feeling so guilty about. And maybe more besides. She has been in the right place at the right time rather a lot recently.

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The night has been uneventful. Will lay pressed up against Hannibal his head against his side for the first hour, gradually relaxing and going to sleep, still tethered by the robe tie to Hannibal's wrist. Hannibal slept all the way through and didn't wake until just after eight. Unusually late for him. Will is still asleep when he gets up and goes to the kitchen. Brian is there, already been out and back for a run, making coffee

'You've guessed haven't you?'

Hannibal nods.

'Do the others know?'

'I don't think so. Will knows there's something, but not what. I suspect it will not be long before he works it out.'

'I'll tell him before he does. I'll tell all of them. I'm an idiot. I'm very sorry. What are you going to do'

'Nothing. It's for you to act on it, or not'

'So you'll keep my secret?'

'As you, I'm sure, are keeping mine. Or at least, Will's'

'Yeah. None of us will say anything about that. I did mention to Freddie that you were his shrink. Before I realised. I'm really sorry. I didn't quite know what..'

'It's alright. None of us know quite what it is. Including Will' He takes a mouthful of the coffee and nods to it 'good coffee, thank you'

'Or you?'

Hannibal smiles slightly 'sometimes knowing and understanding are two different things. I think I understand it. But know it? I'm not so sure. Understanding, I sometimes think, comes from the heart, and knowing? Knowing comes from the head. Usually I'm very good at knowing.'

Brian sighs 'I haven't managed either for a while. I'm trying.' He struggles for a bit 'they might hate me. I feel such a shit. But I will tell them'

'I think you may be surprised by the outcome. I find all of you surprising on a regular basis'

Beverly drags herself into the kitchen

'Good surprises or bad ones? I only want good ones today. Like coffee magically appearing and maybe a croissant with gooey cheese. And nice people being nice, and no fucking corpses. Brian surprise me with coffee please.'

Jimmy and Will arrive shortly after, Will pressing his hand between Hannibal's shoulder blades just for a moment as he smiles at Hannibal and the rest of the group.

'Do we eat breakfast and then go home? It feels like it might be time

Chapter End Notes

Titles from the song 'the Teddy Bear's Picnic' which is surprisingly creepy when you actually read the lyrics.

End Notes

Rather fortunately the Hello Kitty Learn Japanese book really exists, as does a Monopoly of Tokyo. My partner's father plays Go for the British team, it's a great game. And don't get me started on bonsai.

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